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The Dal'stroy region is under the complete jurisdiction of the MVD, and almost the entire population is made up of slave labor and common criminals. Even the soldiers guarding the workers have been sent there for some "crime"; the crime of most of them was that they let themselves be made prisoners of the Germans during the war. The officers, however, serve in Dal'stroy voluntarily, usually for a 3-year period, and it is believed that a tour of duty there helps them in their career.

Working conditions are very severe, food is insufficient, and the clothing is most inadequate. Gold is dug both in underground mines and in surface mines, but, contrary to general belief, it is much harder to work in the surface mines. The work consists of digging holes about 10 centimeters deep and 10 centimeters wide. It is very difficult to penetrate the frozen ground, especially because hand tools are used exclusively. Each prisoner is expected to dig at least four holes every day. After the rock has been loosened with the explosive charges, it is washed in the usual way. This phase of the work is performed by the more trusted forced laborers, called the "beskonvoiniki", who are not kept under the same close supervision as the other prisoners. The daily quota expected of each washer is from 12 to 15 ounces of pure gold.

Those miners and washers who are very diligent or lucky and are able to exceed their quotas are rewarded in proportion to the extra output. For example, one of the prisoners who found a gold nugget weighing about 500 grams was rewarded by having his 15-year sentence reduced by 5 years. (Haeffner himself received 8 months off his sentence because he fulfilled his quota by 150-200 percent.)

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